

“LIFE’S CHALLENGES”

PP

King Solomon, the son of King David, wrote about a person's choices and priorities, in the book of Ecclesiastes. The mood of the book Ecclesiastes is generally sadness. The key expressions are “under the sun,” “perceived,” and “I said in my heart.” When reading the book of Ecclesiastes, we find the word labor = 23 times, evil = 22 times and vexation of spirit = 9 times.

Within the history of the church, there have been two basic views on the theology of the book, Ecclesiastes. On the one hand, some describe the contents of the book as pessimistic, cynical, skeptical, or agnostic. Picturing the author as a man of doubt who has wandered far from God. On the other hand, many interpret the book quite positively. The author is a man of faith, a realist, who sees a man simply cannot put the whole of life together.

The latter view is favored since the author King Solomon, believes God is good. We see in Ecclesiastes 2:24 and also in chapter 3:13, King Solomon likewise believes God has a wise plan. He writes of that in chapter 3: 11, 14; 7:14; and 8:17. He believes God is just in Eccl 3:17; and 8:11-13. And always exhorts men to fear God in 8:12, 13; 12:13, 14.

The thought of the book centers in six key ideas. Three of these are negative and revolve around the problems of life: (1) all is vanity. (2) man is limited. (3) God is hidden. The other three are positive and give the solution to life's crises, (1) fear God and keep His commandments. (2) enjoy life, and (3) use wisdom properly.

All six ideas are scattered throughout the book, but taken together they demonstrate that the purpose of the book is to show men that they should lead Godly and joyous lives, even through they live in a world of divinely condoned mysteries.

Ecclesiastes 3: verse 3. King Solomon the son of King David, wrote about a person's priorities. The mood of the book is generally one of sadness. Key

expressions are: (1). under the sun; (2). I perceived; (3). “I said in my heart.” The word labor occurs 23 times; 2. evil 22 times; 3. vexation of spirit 9 times.

Starting in Eccl. 3: 1-8, we find there are: 28 priorities which are probably intended to symbolize the whole period of life. This list is made up of opposites. (A); 14 are positive; (B); and 14 are negatives.

Starting with Eccl. 3:1, “to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” We find this to be true when recognizing God's plan for man that's been laid down through God's annual Holy Days, and through His weekly Sabbaths.

Eccl 3:2 relates to us, “a time to be born, and a time to die.” Birth and death are the two most important events in a person's life. You and I have no control over the time of our entrance into this world and little control over the time of our exit from it. (Verse 2 continues to say) “a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” That's talking about farming and harvesting, could also be including our personal gardening.

Eccl 3:3, “a time to kill, and a time to heal.” This is referring to warfare and capital punishment. Verse 3 continues with “a time to break down, and a time to build up.” This is saying there is a time to demolish the out dated old buildings and erect new ones.

Eccl. 3: 4, “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” This verse is self explanatory.

Eccl.3:5, “a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together.” Taken at face value, this means there is a time to clear land for cultivation. Reference to this is found in Isa 5:2, then there is a time to gather stones for a building walls and houses or other projects. Verse 5 finishes with “a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.”

Eccl. 3:6, “a time to get, and a time to lose.” This makes us think of business cycles, with their fluctuating profits and losses. “a time to keep, and a time to cast away.” All families are familiar with what this means, we store and stash things away then we

CHURCH OF GOD, IN TRUTH **PROVE ALL THINGS**

clear them out! That is the advantage of moving!

Eccl.3:7, "a time to rend, and a time to sew." This makes us think of the constant fashions changes in clothing, ladies dresses, hems are let out or shortened! Mens fashions changes as well. Baggy pants or tight pants. Wide ties or skinny ties. Last of that verse says, "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." There are circumstances under which "silence is golden." Pro. 25:11 tells us, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of Silver."

Eccl.3:8, "a time to love, and a time to hate." Solomon was not speaking as a Christian, but a man of the world. It seemed to him that human behavior fluctuated between periods of love and periods of hate. The rest of verse 8 says, "a time of war, and a time of peace." That's all we seem to hear of the news today. There is nothing new under the sun, Solomon said in verse 14 of Eccl 1, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." All these things pertain to life it's a question of setting right priorities! Because priorities play a major role in our lives. We need to learn to do the right thing at the right time.

The two top priorities as Christians is found in Matt 6:33, "Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; And all these things shall be added unto you." The greatest purpose for a Christian is to: seek after God's kingdom (His government), the real one world order and seek after His righteousness! Meaning, endorse His law's, statutes and judgments, while applying the fruits of His Holy Spirit.

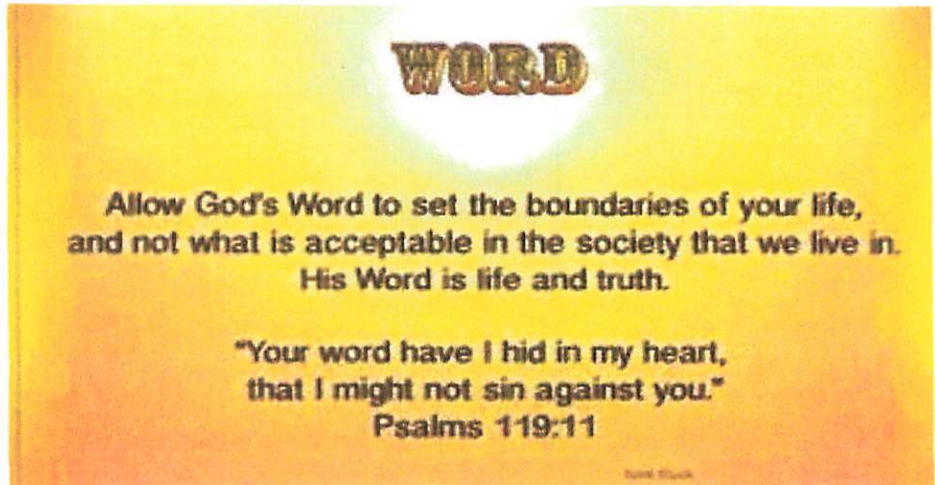
Most men are engrossed in laboring for the meat that perishes. John 6:27, "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for Him hath God the Father sealed."

Notice what Christ said to the woman of Samaria in John 4:13-14, "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again. But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."

Most men spend money for physical bread, and

labor for that which does not satisfy. Too often we are prone to make all these material things the main object of our search for life. Christ wants us to make first things first, He assures us that things of lesser importance and value will be supplied to each according to his need's – not his want's.

The first two priorities, **seek** first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, demands our attention. The Lord knows and delivers those who are striving to obey Him.

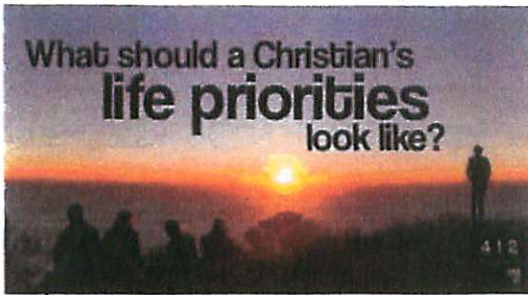


Seek means to: inquire into. To follow up on the traces of divine majesty and power. Take in and apply the knowledge of God, promote the glory of God, attempt to establish God's ways, find favor with God.

These first two priorities, He tells us through David's Psalms, "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saves such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalms 34:17-18). Note verse 17,- the Lord does not deliver us from troubles, He delivers us out of them and in verse 18, the Lord knows how to resist the proud but He can not resist a broken and contrite heart!!

Today, mankind is not living within the boundary of God's priorities. They are living in the boundary of human nature - practicing what the Apostles Paul wrote to Timothy about. 2 Tim. 3:13, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." Backup to verse 1 of 2 Tim 3:1-5, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false

accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." God's ways are not on this list of priorities. Our daily priorities are to be laced with God in mind.



There are many examples in God's word that deal with priorities. Remember the story of

Martha and Mary in Luke 10, the two sisters that Christ visited, both sister like and respected Christ very much, both did what they thought was most important when He came to see them. Luke 10:39-40, "Martha had a sister called Mary, which sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister Mary has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

There is nothing wrong with serving. All of us are called to serve. Paul speaking to the Galatians said, "Brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not Liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." Gal 5:13.

We know Christ Himself was the greatest servant of all. Christ helped Martha by telling her which priorities come first! "Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken a way from her" (Luke 10:41-42). Just then the most important thing Mary and Martha could do was listen to Christ's life saving - teachings!

Looking at Luke chapter 9 we find men, who had their priorities wrong. "And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow You whithersoever You go. And Jesus said unto him, foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay His head" (Luke 9:57-58).

At first; the answer from Jesus does not seem to be related to the man's offer. Actually, however, there was a very close connection. Jesus was saying in effect! Do you really know what it means to follow

Me? It mean's, forsaking the comforts and conveniences of life, like not having a permanent-home, to live in. Your time is spent serving others. Foxes and birds have more natural comfort and security than Christ had.

Christ read their mind. They were unwilling to give up the common comforts of life to follow Jesus Christ!! "And He said unto another, follow Me. but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, let the dead bury their dead: but go you and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow You; but let me first bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-62).

We have three cardinal excuses illustrated in the experiences of these men- 1. material comfort; 2. family and friends means more than obeying God. 3. a job or occupation means more then obeying God. By these examples God did not come first in their list of priorities, they seemed to regret being called and given God's word of truth to follow.

In Luke 14 and Matthew 10, we find another requirement for discipleship. "And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and love less his father, and mother, And wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own Life also, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:25-26).

Our Saviors words are absolute. He made clear that if we did not love Him supremely, more than our Family and more than our lives, we could not be His disciples. There is no half way measures! Matt. 10: 37, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

When called, a choice must be made between Christ and family. Our personal ambitions and worldly



possessions must be laid on the alter of sacrifice! And the spirit of sacrifice must be maintained permanently, material possessions must **not** be our first priority. If we put first things first, God will always take care of our needs .

Our baptism was symbolic of our decision to put God first in our life. We need to ask ourselves do we still feel the zeal for God's love the same way today? Is that new man we put on, still put on?

When reading Matthew 22, We find love has its priorities. "But when the pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, you shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:34-40). In Mark's account He adds the phrase "and with all your strength, this is the first commandment." (Mark 12:30). And in verse 31, And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." We cannot love God without loving our neighbors.

In John's first epistle he wrote "If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20). Christ is emphasizing we are to put on Christ's love.

As spokes in a wheel get nearer to the center, they get closer to one another, thus, as we get closer to the Lord, the more we will love our fellow believers. 1 John 4:21, "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loves God love his brother also." We show our love by fellow-shiping, showing hospitality, praying for one another, fasting, Bible study, these are all priorities! These are indispensable tools for growth toward God's kingdom. God's word (the Bible) must have priorities over all other readings and studies.

Satan would like for you to be confused about your priorities. Don't let that happen, follow God and put God first in all things! We are the first fruits (the bride) that's called before the big harvest, with a mission to prepare for the big harvest, so it is important to set our priorities straight.

We are told in Phil 2:1- 8, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

fulfil you my joy, that you be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the stake."

Satan wants us to be puffed up, thinking of our self better than others. But God wants us to be humble. Isa 66:2, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word." Isa 66: 5, "Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at His word; your Brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name's sake, Said, let the Lord be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed."

We must continue to keep in mind God wants us to count others better than ourselves. That's the difference between God's teachings and the teachings of this world, that's under Satan's influences. We have to fight Satan every day in order to keep our priorities in check. It takes work and mind breaking effort!! It's like moving a mountain with a shovel, one scoop full at a time, but overcoming Satan we must! We must remember God is the source of our strength!! Phil 2:13, "For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. And, "Bing confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

When we are growing and overcoming we are going to reflect a positive outlook with a humble attitude. God's Holy Spirit will blend everything together for the right decision making when it comes to priorities what ever the circumstances. Let's live to please God!! That's our first and foremost priority!!!

King Solomon's final word's are: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His Commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. 📖

James Russell